

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SAA-01 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08
INR-10 LAB-04 NSAE-00 SIL-01 IO-13 DODE-00 PM-05
H-01 L-03 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11 /103 W
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R 090710Z AUG 78 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8570
INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY KABUL
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMCONSUL KARACHI
AMCONSUL LAHORE
CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: N/A
TAGS: ELAB PINT PORG PK
SUBJ: PAKISTAN'S LABOR SITUATION

1. SUMMARY: ON AUGUST 7, NEWLY ASSIGNED LABOR REPORTING OFFICER (LRO) CALLED ON MR. MAHMOOD AKHTAR, CENTRAL LABOR ADVISOR, PAKISTAN MINISTRY OF LABOR. AKHTAR, KNOWN AS ONE OF THE MORE OUTSPOKEN OFFICIALS IN THE MINISTRY, HELD A FRANK AND WIDE-RANGING DISCUSSION COVERING SUCH TOPICS AS THE CURRENT LABOR SITUATION IN PAKISTAN, HIS PROJECTIONS FOR THE FUTURE COURSE THE
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GOVERNMENT WILL TAKE IN DEALING WITH THE LABOR MOVEMENT, AND SOME RECENT AGITATION AND DISTURBANCES AMONG WORKERS CAUSED BY LEFTIST/COMMUNIST AGITATORS. HE ALSO REVIEWED THE PAKISTANI POSITION ON THE ILO AND ON US WITHDRAWAL FROM THAT ORGANIZATION.
END SUMMARY.

2. AKHTAR STATED THAT DESPITE THE MARTIAL LAW AUTHORITY (MLA) BAN

ON STRIKES, THE PERIOD 1 JANUARY THROUGH 31 MAY 1978 SAW 31 STRIKES TAKE PLACE IN PAKISTAN, INVOLVING 10,013 WORKERS AND RESULTING IN 19,552 MAN-DAYS LOST. THESE STRIKES WERE CENTERED IN THE PUNJAB AND SIND PROVINCES, WITH BALUCHISTAN AND THE NWFP LABOR SCENE REMAINING "REMARKABLY" QUIET. PRIMARY CENTER OF LABOR PROBLEMS REMAINS KARACHI, WHERE THE DEPRESSED ECONOMY HAS CONTINUED TO CAUSE SIZEABLE LAYOFFS OF WORKERS, AND IN MANY CASES, THE REDUCTION OR CURTAILMENT OF WAGES OF WORKERS STILL EMPLOYED. LACK OF EMPLOYMENT, COUPLED WITH GROWING INFLATION, ARE THE CENTRAL PROBLEMS PLAGUING THE LABORING CLASS AT PRESENT. AKHTAR STATED THAT A RECENT GOVERNMENT STUDY SHOWED THAT THE MAN-DAYS LOST IN THE PAST YEAR DUE TO LAYOFFS EXCEEDS THE TOTAL TIME LOST DUE TO ALL STRIKES AND OTHER JOB ACTIONS BY ORGANIZED LABOR FOR THE FIVE YEARS PREVIOUS TO THE PERIOD STUDIED. BECAUSE OF THE DISMAL PICTURE PRODUCED BY THE STUDY, THE MLA HAS DECIDED NOT TO PUBLISH THE REPORT.

3. AKHTAR BELIEVES THAT THE MLA PLANS TO PUSH FOR A SYSTEM THAT MIGHT BE BEST DESCRIBED AS AUTOMATIC BINDING ARBITRATION, AS THE BEST SOLUTION FOR RESOLVING LABOR DISPUTES AND NEGOTIATIONS IN THE FUTURE. THE MLA BELIEVES THAT A MAJOR PROBLEM WITH THE PAKISTANI ECONOMY IS A LOW PRODUCTIVITY LEVEL BY LABOR (ALTHOUGH AKHTAR IS QUICK TO POINT OUT THAT THE GOP LACKS THE ABILITY EVEN TO ATTEMPT PRODUCTIVITY STUDIES), AND THAT ALLOWING UNIONS THE RIGHT TO STRIKE WOULD ONLY ADD TO THE LOSS OF PRODUCTIVITY. A SPEECH BY MINISTER OF LABOR AND MANPOWER, CHAUDHRY ZAHUR ELAHI, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ON 31 JULY AT A RECEPTION BY THE PAKISTAN UNITED UNION OF RAILWAY WORKERS IN LAHORE WAS THE OPENING MOVE BY THE MLA TO INTRODUCE THE NEW PROGRAM. ELAHI FIRMLY STATED THAT THE GOVERNMENT FULLY SUPPORTED "NEGOTIATIONS" RATHER THAN "CONFRONTATION" AS THE PROPER METHOD FOR LABOR TO OBTAIN ITS DEMANDS, AND INDICATED THAT THE MINISTRY OF LABOR WOULD LIKE TO TAKE PART IN SUCH NEGOTIATIONS. AKHTAR COULD NOT PROVIDE ANY INFORMATION AS TO WHAT OTHER STEPS THE MLA MAY BE PLANNING IN THIS AREA, NOR GIVE ANY TIMETABLE FOR ACTUAL IMPLEMENTATION OF SUCH A PLAN.

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

4. AKHTAR REPLIED TO A QUERY ABOUT REPORTS OF RECENT DISTURBANCES IN RAWALPINDI AMONG LABORERS BY STATING THAT A SERIES OF SMALL DEMONSTRATIONS HAD IN FACT TAKEN PLACE OVER THE PERIOD FROM JULY 29 THROUGH AUGUST 4. THESE DEMONSTRATIONS HAD INVOLVED FROM 50-75 INDIVIDUALS, MOSTLY LABORERS, AND WERE HELD TO PROTEST THE HIGH AND GROWING COST OF FOODSTUFFS. NO SPECIFIC UNION WAS INVOLVED, AND THE GOVERNMENT WAS CONVINCED THAT THE INCIDENTS WERE ORGANIZED BY WELL-KNOWN LEFTIST/COMMUNIST AGITATORS, SIMPLY TO AGGRAVATE THE GOVERNMENT. THE MOST SERIOUS INCIDENT TOOK PLACE ON 29 JULY, WHEN 75 INDIVIDUALS GATHERED IN THE LOCAL BAZAAR IN
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RAWALPINDI, SHOUTING ANTI-GOVERNMENT SLOGANS. POLICE MOVED IN AND EVENTUALLY ARRESTED 24 INDIVIDUALS (ALL 24 WERE LATER SENTENCED TO ONE-YEAR PRISON TERMS, PLUS TEN LASHES, FOR THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN THE DEMONSTRATION) AND THERE WERE NO INJURIES. FOLLOW-ON DEMONSTRATIONS WERE STAGED IN THE CITY OVER THE NEXT FEW DAYS, BUT THESE WERE SMALL, AND AGAIN INVOLVED NO VIOLENCE. POLICE ON 4 AUGUST FINALLY ARRESTED ONE LUKMAN MILZAD, IDENTIFIED BY AKHTAR AS A KEY COMMUNIST ACTIVIST, AND THAT APPARENTLY SUCCEEDED IN ENDING THE DISTURBANCES. AKHTAR EXPECTS SIMILAR SMALL-SCALE DISTURBANCES DURING THE NEXT FEW MONTHS, WITH LEFTIST/COMMUNIST ELEMENTS PLAYING ON THEMES SUCH AS INFLATION AND LACK OF JOBS TO INCITE LABORING CLASS INDIVIDUALS TO PROTEST, BUT EXPECTS NO

SERIOUS LABOR PROBLEMS FROM THE ORGANIZED LABOR MOVEMENT DURING THIS PERIOD.

5. AKHTAR DID, HOWEVER, VOICE HIS PERSONAL OPINION THAT HIS PREDICTIONS OF RELATIVE CALM ON THE LABOR SCENE MIGHT BE UPSET BY THE OUTCOME OF THE PENDING BHUTTO CASE. HE BELIEVES THAT A HARSH SENTENCE OF DEATH OR LONG IMPRISONMENT WILL CAUSE A VERY NEGATIVE AND POSSIBLY VIOLENT REACTION AMONG THE WORKERS, AND COULD RESULT IN MAJOR DISTURBANCES. HE STRESSED THAT THIS WAS HIS PERSONAL VIEW, BUT WAS BASED ON HIS LONG AND CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH THE LABORING CLASSES OF THE COUNTRY.

6. DISCUSSION TOUCHED BRIEFLY ON THE ILO AND THE US WITHDRAWAL FROM THAT ORGANIZATION. AKHTAR REPEATED HIS PREVIOUSLY REPORTED VIEWS THAT US WITHDRAWAL HAD OPENED THE ILO TO MANIPULATION BY THE SOVIETS, AND HAD REMOVED THE "SHIELD" FROM COUNTRIES LIKE PAKISTAN, WHO FIND IT DIFFICULT TO RESIST SOVIET PRESSURES WITHIN THE ILO WITHOUT THE PRESENCE OF THE US.

7. AKHTAR DISCUSSED AT LENGTH THE NEED TO OBTAIN TRAINING FOR MINISTRY OF LABOR OFFICIALS IN SUCH FIELDS AS PRODUCTIVITY STUDY, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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INDUSTRIAL SAFETY AND GENERAL MANAGEMENT. HE TOUCHED ON THE COMPLETE LACK OF FUNDS AVAILABLE TO HIS ORGANIZATION FOR SUCH PURPOSES. THESE TOPICS WILL BE DISCUSSED VIA SEPARATE COMMUNICATION.
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